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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 002318

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SUBJECT: Zimbabwe: Reports of involuntary relocation of ex-commercial farm workers to Zambezi River basin

REF: Harare 2310

1. Summary: OFDA/Humanitarian Response Advisor in Zimbabwe has received unconfirmed but credible reports of forced relocations of a large group of ex-commercial farm workers. Post views this as an extremely serious development and is concerned that it may signal the beginning of a pattern of forced relocation and displacement that could affect a significant number of the estimated 1-1.5 million displaced farm workers and their families, many of whom the GOZ considers officially not to be Zimbabwean citizens. While many commercial farm workers originate from other countries in the region, large numbers of them have been resident in Zimbabwe for several generations, have no documentation from their countries of origin and should be considered de facto Zimbabweans. Reported relocations are apparently to remote sites close to borders from which relocatees may be encouraged to return to their countries of origin. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is also hearing stories of forced relocations and trying to gain access to the area. OFDA advisor will continue to try to verify these reports directly including, if possible, travel to reported relocation sites to interview affected populations. End Summary

2. OFDA/Humanitarian Response Advisor (HRA) traveled with Ambassador Hall's group to northern Zimbabwe on October 10 to observe a food distribution and do reconnaissance of the area. Ambassador Sullivan, USAID Mission Director and Mission Disaster Officer accompanied. The event took place at the Chiweshi public school in the Muzarabani District on the Zambezi escarpment.

3. In the course of the visit, OFDA/HRA met with a World Food Program (WFP) food monitor at the distribution who said that up to 5,000 farm workers and family members were being assembled in the Gaierenzi area in the Zambezi valley. The WFP food monitor said that some of the farm workers were trucked to these locations. Two political jurisdictions, Chadereka and Dambakurima, were mentioned. These are ward names which are political sub-jurisdictions of districts.

4. The displacement and trucking operation was described as follows: New settlers take over the farms vacated by commercial farmers. Settlers insist on moving into the farm workers' houses and force them to vacate the premises. Wanting the ex-farm workers and house occupants out of sight and out of mind, settlers force former occupants to board lorries for movement to remote sites in the Zambezi plain. On arrival at relocation sites, they are unloaded. According to the WFP monitor, it is the new farmers/settlers who were responsible for trucking the ex-farm workers out of the region and there is no clear evidence of direct Government of Zimbabwe involvement. On arrival at the Zambezi plain, the displaced farm workers and their families must fend for themselves with whatever few personal possessions they were able to carry, no access to farmable land, no seeds and tools with which to begin farming, and no access to humanitarian assistance.

5. OFDA/HRA, operating under concern that farm workers with no jobs and no food would begin to move somewhere (see septel), has for several weeks been trying to locate groupings of them in parts of Zimbabwe. Information developed on this trip with Ambassadors Hall and Sullivan is the first report of trucks being used to relocate ex-farm workers. Note: if events as reported

by the WFP monitor are true and accurate, based on an assumed lorry capacity of 50 people and a total number of 5,000 people moved, that would mean 100 lorry trips in total over a short period of time and signal a systematically planned event as opposed to a spontaneous action.

16. In an effort to corroborate the report, OFDA/HRA put forward an urgent alert October 11 to the UNDP/Relief and Rehabilitation Unit (RRU), the WFP, ICRC, and local Zimbabwean groups seeking answers to the following questions:

- Did this movement as reported indeed happen?
- If so, how many people were involved?
- Is there any indication that the GOZ was in any way involved in this movement?
- What is known about the current condition of the people who were reported to have been moved?
- If the report is true, is there any organization prepared to provide food or other necessary assistance?
- Is this action being replicated anywhere else in the country?
- Is there any significance to depositing these people close to the Mozambican border?

17. On October 16, OFDA/HRA met with representatives of the non-governmental organizations Justice for Agriculture (JAG) and General Agricultural and Plantation Workers Union of Zimbabwe (GAPWUZ) to try to confirm the October 10 information. GAPWUZ officials advised that people had been or were being moved to these sites. One GAPWUZ representative indicated that a relative from the area had noted a substantial increase in the number of farm workers in the area. She described the relocation area as "inhospitable." Over the course of the week, JAG representatives asserted that the reports of trucking were true and speculated that the trucks used were from the GOZ District Development Fund (DDF), but this allegation has not been confirmed.

18. OFDA/HRA is also exploring the possibility that these workers may have come from Guruve in the north west corner of Mashonaland Central adjacent to the Mozambique border. Earlier unconfirmed reports from Justice for Agriculture asserted that some 2,500 farm workers in the Guruve area had been told that they must "get out or die." Based on an average family size of 6, this would mean that some 14,000 people in total could be involved. JAG representatives saw farm workers sitting alongside the road with their possessions September 25.

19. Despite various efforts to locate them, the Guruve farm workers were never found. OFDA/HRA and other humanitarian agencies now suspect that they could be among those relocated to the Chadereka and Danakurima areas. OFDA/HRA will try to confirm whether these people were trucked using official GoZ District Development Fund (DDF) trucks. DDF is responsible for supplying "new farmers" with the necessary inputs for the upcoming agricultural season and are essentially GOZ assets.

10. OFDA/HRA's concern is that ex-farm workers with few options are being moved to places near borders that are out of sight and therefore out of mind from international observers. There is a high level of GoZ political control of these areas, which have few entry roads of significance. ICRC is reporting suspicious signs of political control in the sense that people on the ground in the Muzarabani District were attempting to limit their access to the area. Efforts are being made to determine if similar groups of people are showing up near the eastern Mozambique border north of Nyamaroda.

11. Conservative estimates are that the total number of farm workers and family members is 1.0 to 1.5 million. If true, that would constitute nearly one out of every 8 people in Zimbabwe. According to GAPWUZ, approximately 60% of ex-commercial farm workers are of foreign extraction, i.e., from Malawi, Mozambique, or Zambia and are without official legal documentation. However, as reported earlier in septel, most of these workers have been in Zimbabwe for several generations, have no remaining official connection to or documentation from their countries of origin, and should be considered de-facto Zimbabweans.

12. Comment: Post considers reports of forced relocation of ex-commercial farm workers to be credible and will make every effort over the next week to verify information including an estimate of the magnitude of the problem. To this end, OFDA/HRA will attempt to locate and conduct interviews directly with the affected populations at relocation sites. JAG representatives, who have been briefed on how to negotiate their way into

and out of the area, are planning to go there October 19 and are expected back October 20. OFDA/HRA is planning to go to the area as well with Christian Care, the WFP food distributor in the area. If reports are true, the situation would constitute a very serious concern for OFDA and other international organizations providing humanitarian assistance in response to the crisis in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, forced relocation of ex-farm workers, many of whom the GOZ considers to be non-citizens, would constitute an extremely serious and negative development in the ongoing crisis in Zimbabwe.

13. OFDA/HRA will provide by septel a description of efforts to date to systematize information collection about the IDPs, inherent difficulties in collecting that information, role and position of the UNDP/Relief and Recovery Unit on the issue, and recommendations on necessary support from the international community to assist in this effort. SULLIVAN